



Tass via Agence France-Presse

Soviet paratroopers stormed a hospital in Vilnius and captured Lithuanians who had deserted the Soviet Army. Earlier, President Vytautas Landsbergis, at right, conferred with Soviet military officers.

Soviet Troops Reportedly Arrest Lithuanian Deserters at Hospital

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VILNIUS, Lithuania, Tuesday, March 27 — Armed Soviet troops stormed a psychiatric hospital early this morning and arrested a group of Lithuanian deserters from the army who had taken refuge there since the republic's proclamation of independence on March 11, witnesses said.

Some of the deserters were beaten as the troops routed them from the hospital, witnesses said. Hours later there were bloodstains down the stairway, and smashed glass and upended furniture in the ward that had been the Lithuanians' sanctuary since late last week.

The action against the deserters followed conflicting signs, from the Soviet military over the standoff in Lithuania, including the first meeting between Lithuanian leaders and military representatives.

A doctor who was present during the incident at the hospital estimated that about half of the 39 deserters escaped down a fire escape.

Awakened at home early this morning, the Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, said, "Now we can expect anything, that Parliament will also be arrested. The Western states raised hopes that there would not be force. They can say all they want, but Gorbachev does what he wants."

During the night a small group of Soviet troops also moved into the headquarters of the Lithuanian Communist Party in Vilnius. Evidently the latest in a series of seizures of party property instigated by a Communist rump group that has remained loyal to Moscow.

First Use of Armed Force

On Monday, Lithuanian leaders held their first, cordial but inconclusive, talks with Soviet military representatives on Monday, raising hopes in this breakaway republic that Moscow was prepared to relent in its war of nerves.

But the hopes sank on Monday afternoon when the military sent helicopters to shower the population with provocative pamphlets aimed at undermining the defiant government.

The leaflets urged the city's pro-Moscow, Russian and Polish minorities to attend a demonstration Tuesday afternoon outside the Parliament to protest in the very face of the new government against Lithuanian independence.

The arrests this morning at the psychiatric hospital were the first use of

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armed force in the standoff.

Andres Lewandowski, an ABC News cameraman who was standing vigil outside the hospital, said two trucks roared onto the hospital grounds about 3:15 A.M., and about 20 soldiers ran into the building and up to the third-floor ward.

Mr. Lewandowski said his crew was forced at gunpoint to give up its film and its truck was searched. Witnesses said there was no gunfire.

A Deadline Had Passed

The Soviet Government had set a deadline of midnight last Saturday for the surrender of hundreds of Lithuanian young men who have fled the armed forces. The Lithuanian government has offered the deserters moral support but has conceded that it could not provide physical protection.

There had been one earlier confirmed report of an abduction of a de-

serter, and unconfirmed rumors that other military evaders were seized by military patrols.

In recent days, young Lithuanians in the Soviet Army have continued to show their belief in the secessionist government by deserting at its behest. Four more arrived here on Monday morning after an audacious desertion in full uniform at the Leningrad railroad station.

Dr. Konstantin Daskjevic, a psychiatrist who was present at the hospital when soldiers arrived this morning, said that an army officer arrived at the door of the ward and announced: "We are taking them. They are our soldiers."

When the doctor pointed to a makeshift Red Cross flag, the officer said, "They are not sick."

He said the troops shoved the deserters and hit some of them in the face, kicked open doors and turned over beds in a 15-minute search for the young men.

The doctor said one of the soldiers

teased as he left, "This means we will storm the Parliament soon."

Mr. Landsbergis said this morning the seizure of the deserters in the psychiatric hospital proved that Mr. Gorbachev was now backing away from his commitment to a peaceful resolution.

"Already yesterday Gorbachev changed his position and said he would use force if the situation became dangerous," Mr. Landsbergis said. "This is just a play of words. He himself created this danger. Those boys were there quietly and legally and harming no one."

Mr. Landsbergis angrily speculated that the Kremlin had made a deal with Washington before employing force against the deserters.

"The U.S. sold us out," he charged.

The Lithuanian capital has been in a quiet but anxious spasm of uncertainty since the republic declared its independence and demanded negotiation with President Mikhail S. Gorbachev over details of the break.

The independent Lithuanian government, led by President Landsbergis, had begun Monday on a note of qualified optimism, having finally succeeded in talking with Soviet military commanders about a series of tense incidents involving Soviet soldiers.

But it ended the day concerned that the demonstration called for Tuesday was intended to intimidate the new government and provoke trouble in the streets.

In Moscow, Mr. Gorbachev was reported to have renewed his commitment to a peaceful solution in Lithuania but to have indicated that he might use force if lives were threatened.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, told a news conference after a meeting with Mr. Gorbachev that the Soviet leader had spent most of their 90 minutes together discussing Lithuania.

"President Gorbachev indicated to me that the position of the Soviet Government was that there would be no use of force unless lives were threatened," the Senator said.



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There were talks in Vilnius, but Moscow also dropped leaflets that were seen as intimidation.

Implicit Criticism of U.S.

The Tass press agency quoted Mr. Gorbachev as implicitly criticizing the United States and other countries for their expressions of concern about Soviet handling of the situation.

Mr. Gorbachev said the decision by the Soviet legislature voiding the Lithuanian declaration of independence and calling for measures to protect Soviet interests "should be respected by those who decisively defend their own constitution and legality at home."

Thus far the Soviet leader has rebuffed proposals for negotiations with the Lithuanians and talked only of informal "dialogue."

Monday was marked by a nearly palpable yearning from some Lithuanian officials for a promising hint from Moscow that the current situation might move beyond the daily standoff of waiting for more concrete progress.

Equally clear was the continuing suspicion by other officials that the series of relatively minor but steady shows of military presence in the city was not simply the work of local Soviet loyalists but part of a larger design for intimidation, crafted in the Kremlin.

"I think it's Gorbachev's own doing," a deputy head of Parliament, Kazimieras Motieka, said of the incidents. They began with a predawn tank parade on Saturday and have included the seizure of a half-dozen Communist Party buildings unimportant now except for their symbolic value.

Most important is the fact that armed Soviet soldiers are serving as building guards in behalf of the rump Communist Party loyal to Mr. Gorbachev.

But President Landsbergis went out of his way today to spare Mr. Gorbachev any blame. He said Lithuanians should understand that the Soviet leader was under pressure from various forces, including the "military-industrial complex."

Alternating the tone of his comments from concern to hope, Mr. Landsbergis

said he had received word of the possibility of Senator Kennedy's "acting as an intermediary for the start of negotiations."

"It is good news," he said. But he had to concede he had no certain knowledge that this would happen.

On Sunday night, the seizure of a Communist school building by party loyalists and some soldiers left Deputy Prime Minister Romualdas Ozolas anxiously warning that he had information that the seat of the new government might be next.

This morning, however, as the government was searching for even the faintest signal from Moscow, Mr. Ozolas reported "a breakthrough" in the form of the meeting with Soviet officers over the building seizures.

"This is the basis for negotiations on a higher level," said Mr. Ozolas, as other officials said they had received qualified assurance that there was no plan to seize the Parliament.

Alarmed by Helicopters

By midday, however, as the demonstration leaflets wafted down upon the city, Mr. Landsbergis denounced the continuing attempt to "intimidate" Lithuania.

The leaflets were less alarming to many than the military helicopters that delivered them, signaling once again that the army was hardly neutral.

While preoccupied with Mr. Gorbachev's silence, the new Parliament went ahead forming a new Cabinet.